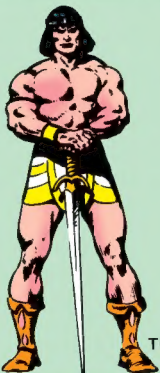


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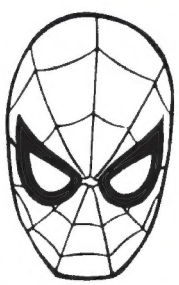


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MIGHTIEST MONARCH OF A TIME-LOST LAND!

KING CONAN



Stan Lee
PRESENTS:

KING CONAN

Featuring The Epic Adventurer
Created By ROBERT E. HOWARD

BONES OF THE BROWN MAN

THE SAFETY OF FORT THANDRA LIES BEHIND THEM, THE DREAD BLACK RIVER LIES AHEAD, AND BEYOND THAT AWAIT THE SAVAGE PICTS.

WILL IT BE MUCH LONGER, FATHER?

THE RIVER IS NOW IN SIGHT, CONN, BUT DON'T BE SO IMPATIENT TO EMBRACE DANGER.

RARE THAT A KING SHOULD LEAVE THE PAMPERED SAFETY OF HIS THRONE TO EMBARK ON SUCH A PERILOUS JOURNEY--ESPECIALLY THE KING OF AQUILONIA, MOST POWERFUL OF ALL CIVILIZED NATIONS...

...BUT THEN, AQUILONIA HAS NEVER BEFORE KNOWN A KING SUCH AS CONAN...

DOUG
MOENCH
WRITER

* JOHN
BUSCEMA
ARTIST

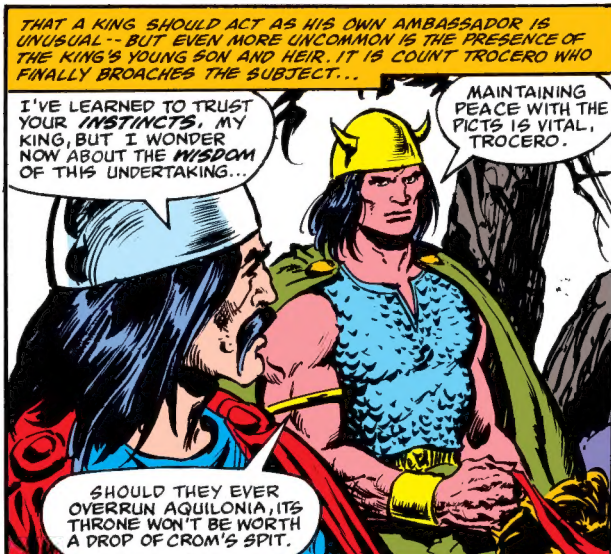
* ERNIE
CHAN
INKER

* JANICE
CHIANG
LETTERER

* GEORGE
ROUSSOS
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* LOUISE
JONES
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* JIM
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EDITOR-IN-CHIEF

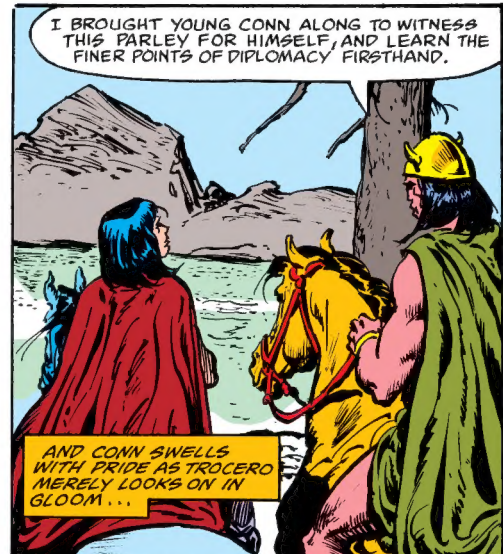


THAT A KING SHOULD ACT AS HIS OWN AMBASSADOR IS UNUSUAL -- BUT EVEN MORE UNCOMMON IS THE PRESENCE OF THE KING'S YOUNG SON AND HEIR. IT IS COUNT TROCERO WHO FINALLY BROACHES THE SUBJECT...

I'VE LEARNED TO TRUST YOUR *INSTINCTS*, MY KING, BUT I WONDER NOW ABOUT THE *WISDOM* OF THIS UNDERTAKING...

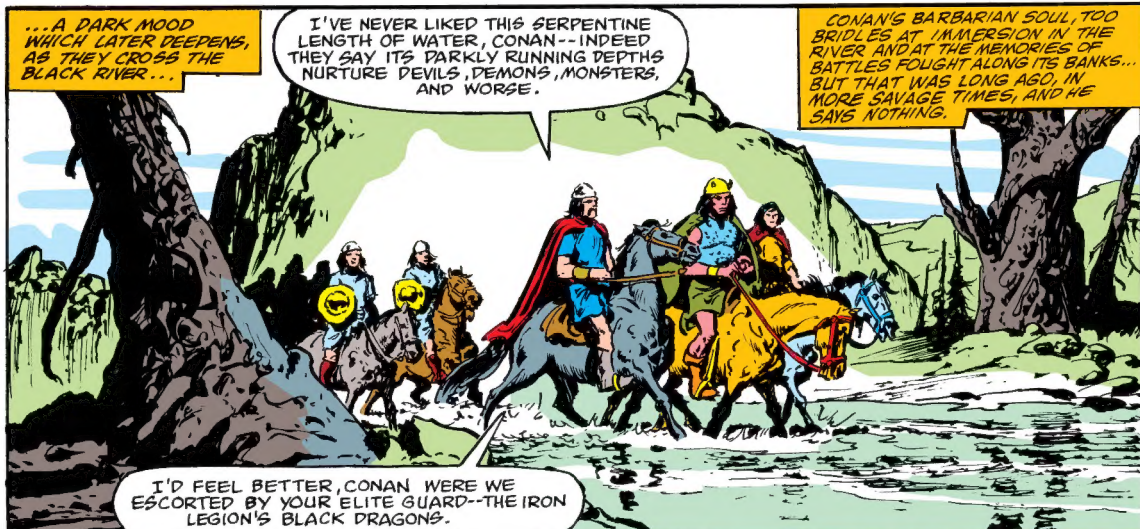
MAINTAINING PEACE WITH THE PICTS IS VITAL, TROCERO.

SHOULD THEY EVER OVERRUN AQUILONIA, ITS THRONE WON'T BE WORTH A DROP OF CROM'S SPIT.



I BROUGHT YOUNG CONN ALONG TO WITNESS THIS FARLEY FOR HIMSELF, AND LEARN THE FINER POINTS OF DIPLOMACY FIRSTHAND.

AND CONN SWELLS WITH PRIDE AS TROCERO MERELY LOOKS ON IN GLOOM...



...A DARK MOOD WHICH LATER DEEPENS, AS THEY CROSS THE BLACK RIVER...

I'VE NEVER LIKED THIS SERPENTINE LENGTH OF WATER, CONAN--INDEED THEY SAY ITS PARKLY RUNNING DEPTHS NURTURE DEVILS, DEMONS, MONSTERS, AND WORSE.

CONAN'S BARBARIAN SOUL, TOO BRIDLES AT IMMERSION IN THE RIVER AND AT THE MEMORIES OF BATTLES FOUGHT ALONG ITS BANKS... BUT THAT WAS LONG AGO, IN MORE SAVAGE TIMES, AND HE SAYS NOTHING.

I'D FEEL BETTER, CONAN WERE WE ESCORTED BY YOUR ELITE GUARD--THE IRON LEGION'S BLACK DRAGONS.



A LARGE PARTY WOULD CAUSE THE PICTS TO QUESTION OUR INTENTIONS. THEY WATCH US EVEN NOW, PEEING FROM A DOZEN PLACES OF CONCEALMENT ALONG THE BANKS.

AYE, THEY'RE SILENT, SLIPPERY DEVILS.

AND AS THE SMALL GROUP FALLS QUIET, ALL EYES SEARCHING THE OPPOSITE BANK, CONAN TURNS TO HIS SON...

BUT WE COME AS DIPLOMATS, NOT WARRIORS. AND DIPLOMACY IS THE FINE ART OF PEACEFUL COMPROMISE.

REMEMBER THAT, CONN, ON THE DAY YOU BECOME KING.



SOON, EMERGING FROM THE FOREST WILDERNESS THEY APPROACH THE MUD-BEAMED HUTS OF THE OUTERMOST PICT VILLAGE...



IS THAT THEIR LEADER, FATHER, THE ONE RAISING HIS AX IN GREETING?

AYE--HIS NAME IS DEKANAWATHA BLOOD-AX.

WELCOME, CONAN. YOUR SON, O KING, GROWS MUCH AS MY SON AKENAK--BOTH STRONG BEYOND THEIR YEARS...



...AND BOTH READY FOR MANHOOD.

AYE, DEKANAWATHA--CONN IS A STOUT LAD AND WORTHY OF THE PRIDE I TAKE IN HIM.



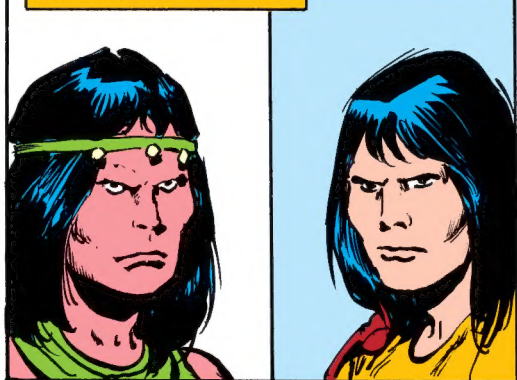
I KNOW. MY OWN PRIDE IN AKENAK FLOWS LIKE THE RIVER.

LONG HOURS LATER...

WE NEED YOUR PERMISSION FOR OCCASIONAL HUNTING FORAYS ACROSS THE BLACK RIVER INTO THE MARSHES, WITHOUT FEAR OF REPRISAL FROM YOUR BOSSONIAN ARCHERS OR OTHER AQUILONIAN PATROLS.

WE ARE AT PEACE NOW, CONAN--NO NEED TO MAINTAIN THE BORDER SO STIFFLY. AFTER ALL, THE NATURE OF THE RIVER ITSELF IS FLUID--

DURING A LONG PAUSE, THE TWO YOUTHS EXCHANGE STARES, EACH SENSING IN THE OTHER A FUTURE ENEMY.



--AND OUR FOOD--GAME HARDLY RECOGNIZES IT AS AN UNCROSSABLE BORDER.



I AGREE IN PRINCIPLE, DEKANAWATHA, BUT I WANT LIMITS ON THE DISTANCE OF ANY SUCH INCURSION AND ON THE NUMBER IN ANY HUNTING PARTY...

...AND ASSURANCES, TOO, THAT YOUR PICTS WILL NOT GO NEAR ANY SETTLEMENTS OR FORTS.

IF THEY DO, YOU MUST ACCEPT THE FACT THAT THEY WILL BE SLAIN ON SIGHT.



LIKE MAD-DOGS, BARBARIAN-KING?

LIKE POTENTIAL RAIDERS, BLOOD-AX!

NOW TRY MY PATIENCE NO FURTHER OR BY MITRA--



YOUR PATIENCE, BARBARIAN? ARE YOU NOT THE ONE WHOSE HASTY CONQUEST OF SURROUNDING STATES HAS--

HAVE CARE, PICT, LEST I--

NO, FATHER! THIS PARLEY WAS TO BE A LESSON IN DIPLOMACY NOT WAR!



AND AS YOU POINTED OUT, DIPLOMACY IS THE FINE ART OF PEACEFUL COMPROMISE.

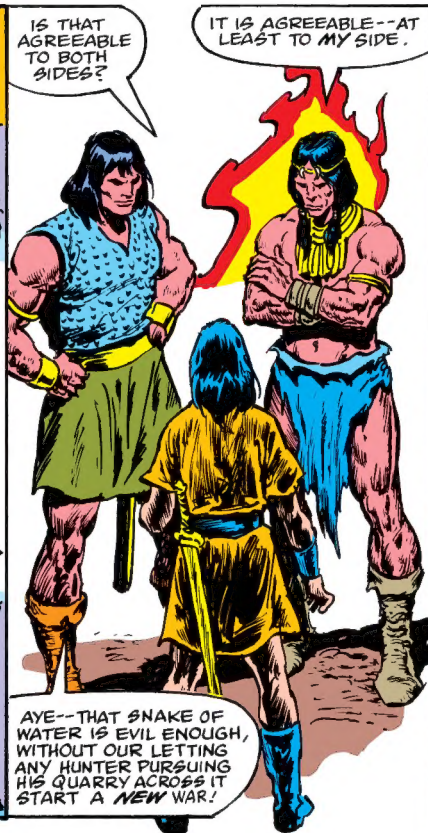
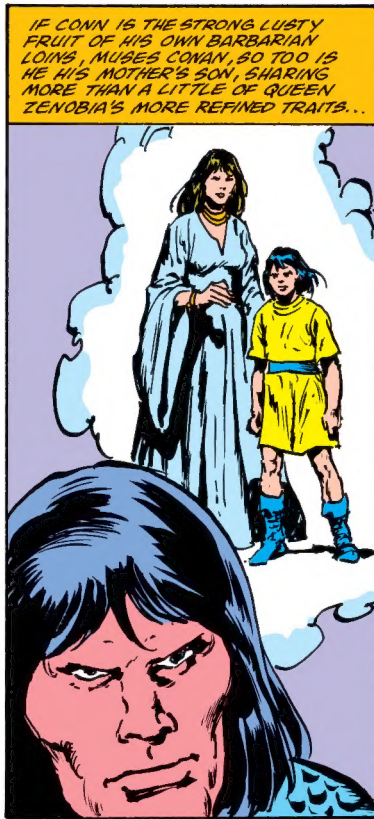
HOW DOES THIS SOUND?--

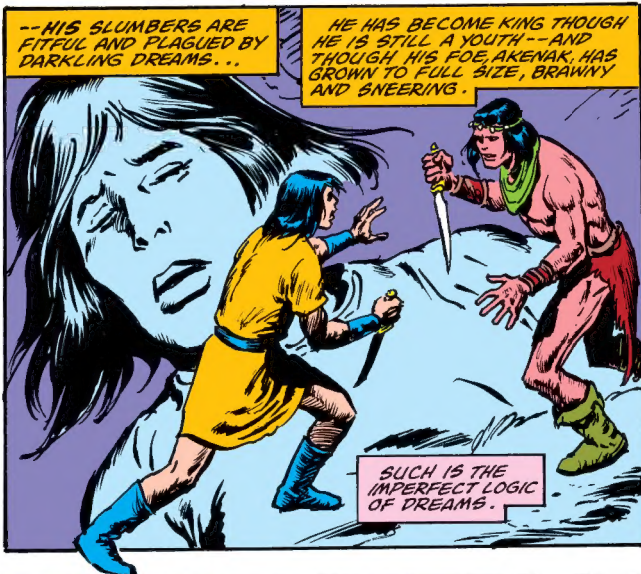


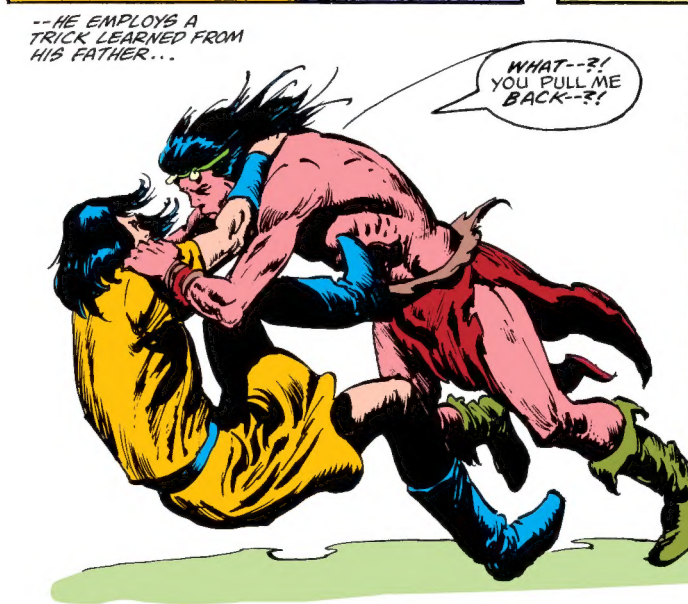
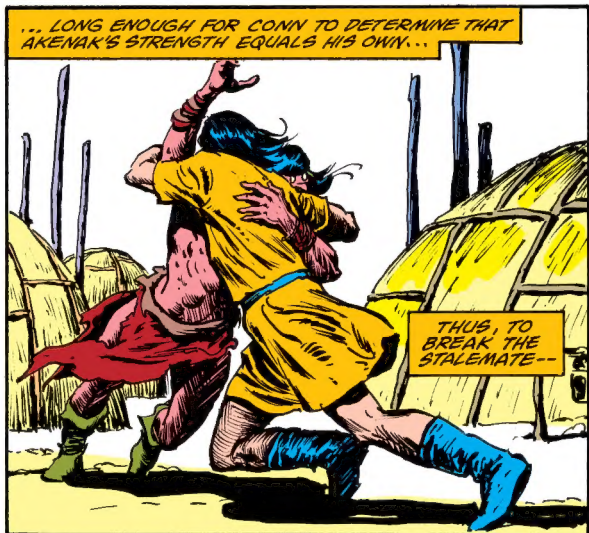
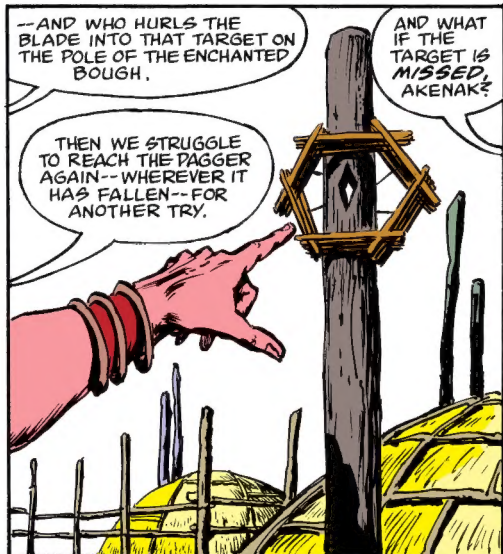
--IF THE NUMBER OF PICT HUNTERS IS LIMITED TO LESS THAN TEN, THEY MAY PURSUE THEIR GAME WHEREVER IT MAY FLEE WITH THE ASSURANCE THAT OUR ARCHERS WILL DRAW NO BOW AGAINST THEM.

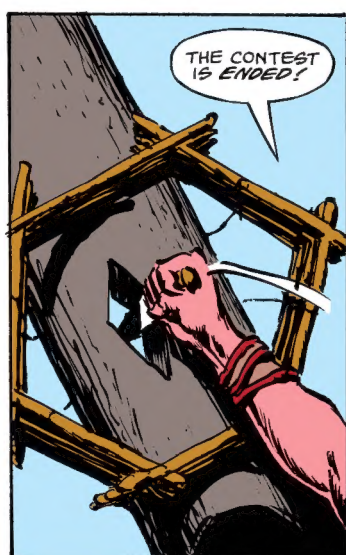
BOTH MEN SLOWLY SHED THEIR GRIM MASKS TO SMILE FAINTLY, FEELING HUMBLER AND SLIGHTLY LUDICROUS.

THE WISDOM OF BABES...











BUT I...
I DIDN'T
KNOW YOU
COULD--

DO YOU SEEK TO HIDE
BEHIND UNFAMILIARITY
WITH THE CONTEST--



--OR WILL YOU ACCEPT
DEFEAT LIKE A MAN!

I... I
ACCEPT
DEFEAT.

AYE, THOUGH HIS EARS
BURN WITH SHAME.



AKENAK! WILL YOU SPEND ALL
YOUR STRENGTH IN FOOLISH
GAMES BEFORE THE RITE EVEN
BEGINS?

COME--
GORANDA
ZEK PREPARES
THE CEREMONY
EVEN NOW!



GORANDA ZEK?
I THOUGHT THE
DRUID *DIVIATIX*
WAS YOUR PRIEST...

DIVIATIX HAD A
VISION DURING
THE NIGHT OF THE
LAST RED MOON,
FRIEND CONAN...

...AND HAS BEEN
GONE THIS PAST
MONTH, FOLLOWING
THE DICTATES OF
HIS INNER SIGHT.



DURING HIS ABSENCE,
GORANDA ZEK SERVES
AS OUR SHAMAN--AND IT IS
HE WHO HAS DEVISED
AKENAK'S RITE OF
PASSAGE.

TAKE YOUR PLACE,
MY SON, AS GORANDA
EXPLAINS YOUR
RITE...

THE TESTS OF MAN-
HOOD FOR A CHIEFTAIN'S
SON ARE THREE, AND MORE
DIFFICULT THAN THOSE
FOR OTHER YOUTHS.



YOU MUST FIND,
GAIN, AND RETURN WITH
THREE PRIZES.

FIRST, THE
WINGS OF AN
EAGLE.

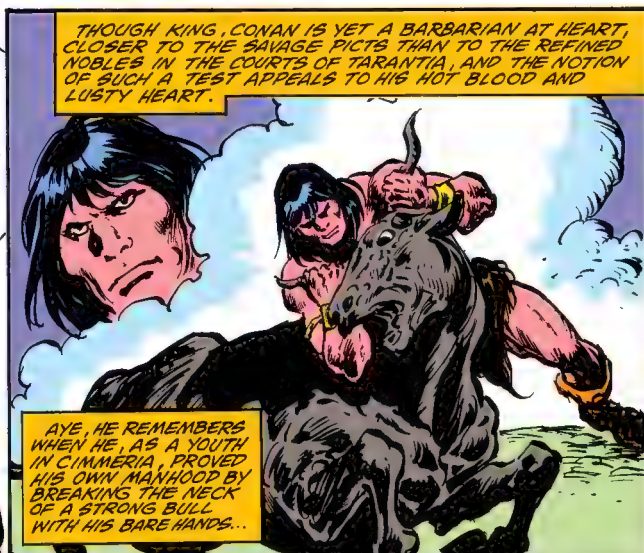
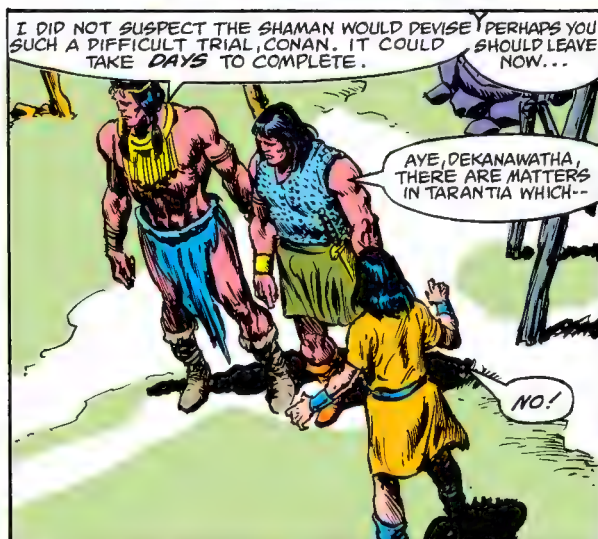
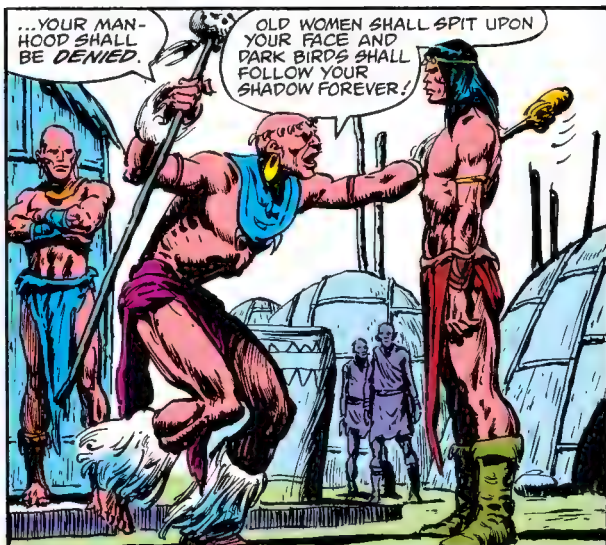
SECOND, THE HORNS OF
A SACRED STAG, WHOM YOU
WILL KNOW FIRST BY HIS TWICE-
CLOVEN HOOF AND LATER BY
HIS COAT OF WHITE.



AND THREE...

...THE TWO
REMAINING
BONES OF YOUR
ANCESTOR WHO
DID SLAY THE
VERY SPIRIT
OF THE
RIVER...

...LOCATED IN A GROTTA
SHRINE HALF A DAY'S
MARCH DOWNRIVER!



HE REMEMBERS, TOO, THE THRILL OF THE KILL, AND THE FEELING OF POWER DERIVED FROM IT, AND SINCE AQUILONA'S CIVILIZED SOCIETY HAS NO ROOM FOR SUCH AN ELEMENTAL RITE...

AND, AS CONN SELECTS HIS WEAPONS, AKENAK SNEERS IN HAUGHTY DISDAIN...



VERY WELL, CONN, I WILL PERMIT IT.

YOU HAVE TAUGHT ME TO TAKE ONLY WHAT I NEED, FATHER, BUT ALSO TO BE PREPARED WITH THE PROPER WEAPON OR TOOL.

SHOULD THE BOW PROVE A HINDRANCE, I SHALL SIMPLY DISCARD IT.



AND CONAN SMILES.



HAH! I NEED ONLY A KNIFE!

WITH THE PREPARATIONS CONCLUDED, THE SHAMAN GORANDA ZEK POINTS HIS FETISH INTO THE DENSE FOREST...



BEGIN-- BY SEEKING THE WINGS OF AN EAGLE!

ARE YOU CERTAIN THIS IS WISE, CONAN? AFTER ALL, CONN IS THE HEIR TO THE THRONE AND--

CEASE YOUR WORRIES FOR TEN HEARTBEATS, AT LEAST, TROCERO.



THE BOY HAS MADE HIS CHOICE. WE WILL AWAIT ITS OUTCOME HERE AND, CROM WILLING, HE WILL RETURN A MAN.

HOURS LATER, DEEP IN THE FOREST NEAR THE BLACK RIVER, CONN'S SHARP EYES HAVE SELECTED A LIKELY CLIFF.



HE SCALES IT WITH THE SWIFT SURENESS AND AGILITY OF YOUTH...

...AND IS REWARDED BY THE SIGHT AND SOUNDS OF A WINDSWEEP AERYLE...

...AND WITHIN IT, TWO SQUALLING EAGLETS AND THE MOTHER--

--RETURNING TO FEED HER YOUNG.

THE FIRST PRIZE IS WITHIN REACH OF A SINGLE LUNGE...

BUT AT THE LAST SECOND, KNIFE HELD HIGH, HE SEES A VIVID IMAGE OF THE TWO YOUNG, ALONE AND FORLORN, LISTLESSLY STARVING IN SLOW DEATH...

IT IS MORE THAN ENOUGH TO STAY HIS BLADE.

THE EAGLE BUCKS--

-- STRAINING TO BEAT ITS PINIONS AGAINST THE WEIGHT OF THE RELUCTANT KILLER ON ITS BACK.

BOTH PLUMMET--

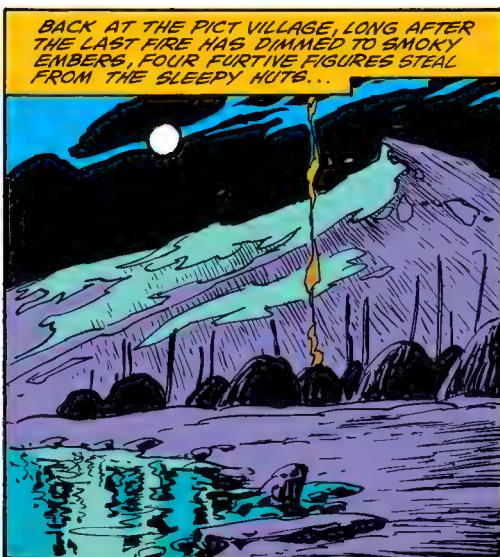
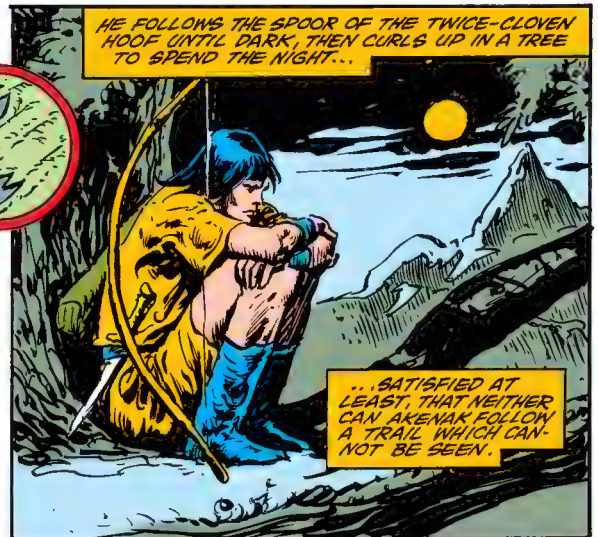
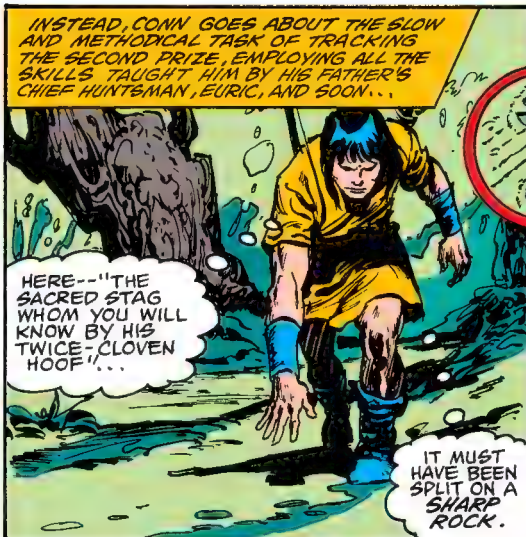
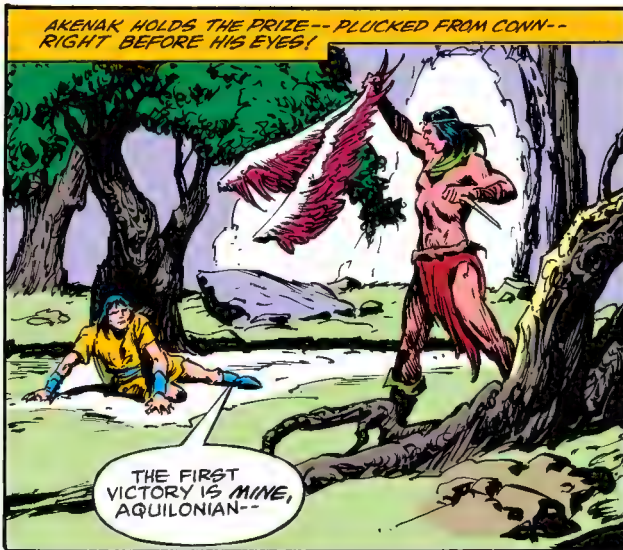
-- AND CRASH, IN A FLURRY OF FEATHERS AND LEAVES, THROUGH THE THICK CANOPY OF TREES.

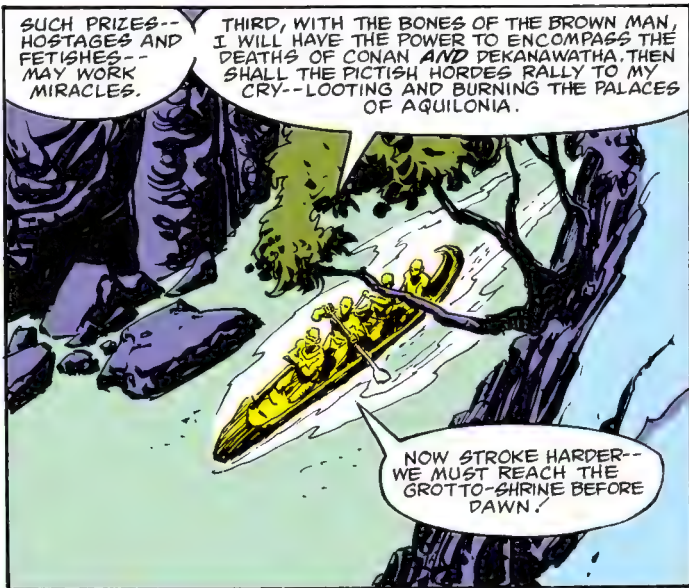
IT IS ENOUGH TO BREAK THE FALL...

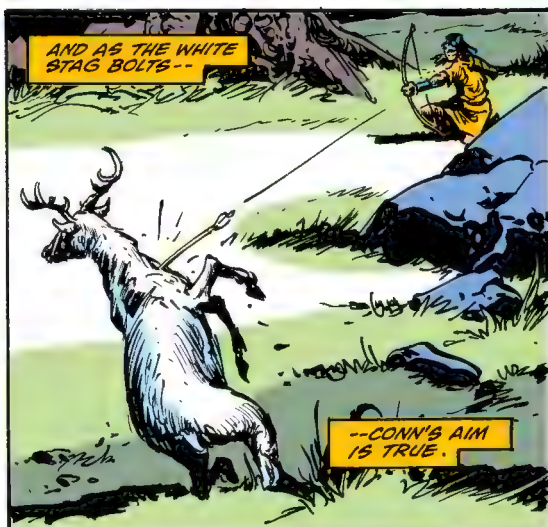
...BUT--

MY THANKS, AQUILONIAN, FOR MAKING THE TASK SO EASY.

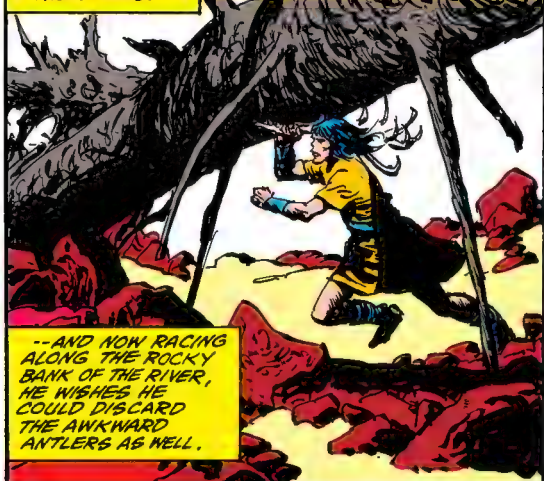
NO--!!





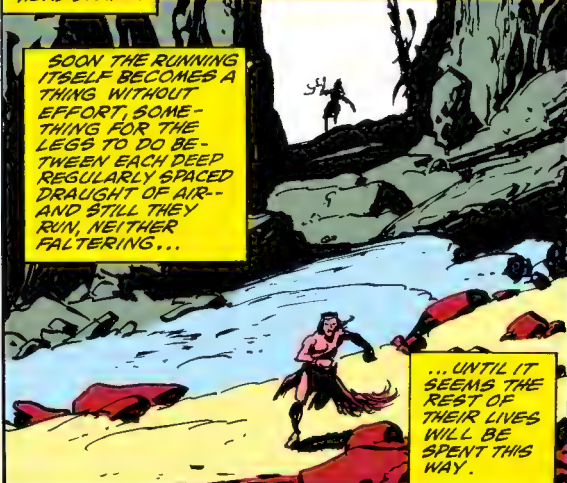


BY MID-AFTERNOON, CONN HAS LONG SINCE ABANDONED HIS BOW IN THE THICK BRUSH OF THE FOREST--



--AND NOW RACING ALONG THE ROCKY BANK OF THE RIVER, HE WISHES HE COULD DISCARD THE AWKWARD ANTLERS AS WELL.

THE RACE IS EVEN THROUGHOUT THE LONG DAY, WITH AKENAK MAINTAINING THE SAME TWENTY-FACE HEADSTART.



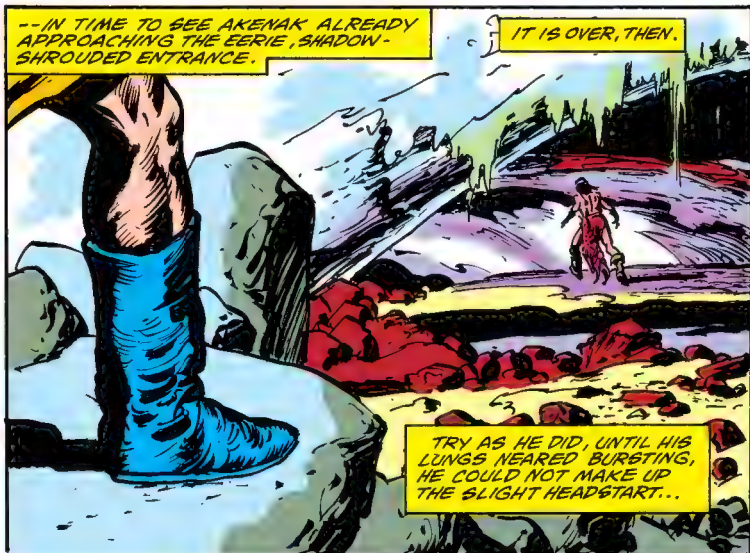
SOON THE RUNNING ITSELF BECOMES A THING WITHOUT EFFORT, SOMETHING FOR THE LEGS TO DO BETWEEN EACH DEEP REGULARLY SPACED DRAUGHT OF AIR-- AND STILL THEY RUN, NEITHER FALTERING...

...UNTIL IT SEEMS THE REST OF THEIR LIVES WILL BE SPENT THIS WAY.

BUT FINALLY, AT TWILIGHT, CONN HALTS AT WHAT CAN ONLY BE THE GROTTA--



--IN TIME TO SEE AKENAK ALREADY APPROACHING THE EERIE, SHADOW-SHROUDED ENTRANCE.



IT IS OVER, THEN.

TRY AS HE DID, UNTIL HIS LUNGS NEARED BURSTING, HE COULD NOT MAKE UP THE SLIGHT HEADSTART...

STILL, THERE CAN BE NO STOPPING NOW...



IF HE IS TO BE TRULY A MAN, HE MUST SEE THIS CONTEST TO ITS END.

BUT INSIDE, BEFORE HIS EYES CAN ADJUST TO THE THICK GLOOM, HE FINDS NOTHING BUT THE STILL FORM OF HIS OPPONENT... AS IF FROZEN IN FEAR...



WHAT? WHAT IS IT, AKENAK? WHY ARE YOU--

HS
SSSS

THEN CONN SEES IT TOO,
LOOMING UP BEFORE THEM--
BLOCKING THE WAY TO THE
TWO BONES LAID ON A
NATURAL ROCK SHRINE.

HSSSSS

ITS NETHER COILS FLOW OUTWARD IN
SMOOTH UNDULATIONS, RAISING THE HEAD
HIGHER AND HIGHER IN HIDEOUS HORROR...

THE SHRINE,
THEN HAS A
GUARDIAN WHICH
GORANDA ZEK
FAILED TO
MENTION.

MOVE, AKENAK!
MOVE, CURSE YOU--
BEFORE IT'S
TOO LATE!

BUT AS THE HUGE SERPENT
PREPARES TO STRIKE, IT
IS CLEAR THAT AKENAK IS
HOPELESSLY TRANSFIXED...

-- AND SO IT IS UP TO
CONN TO DO SO!

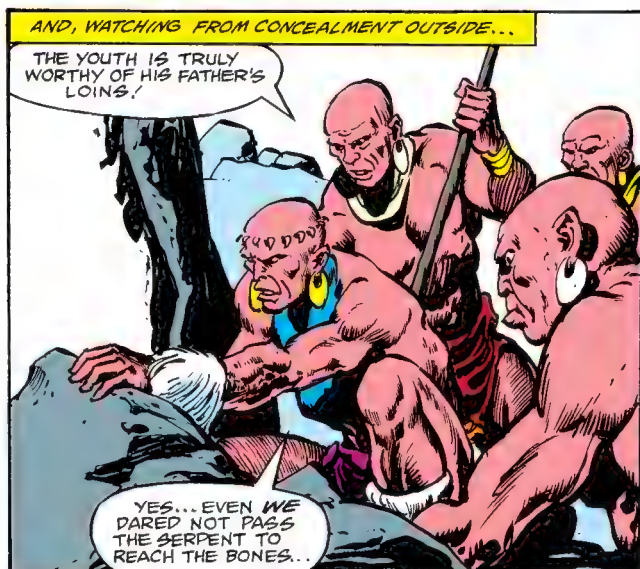
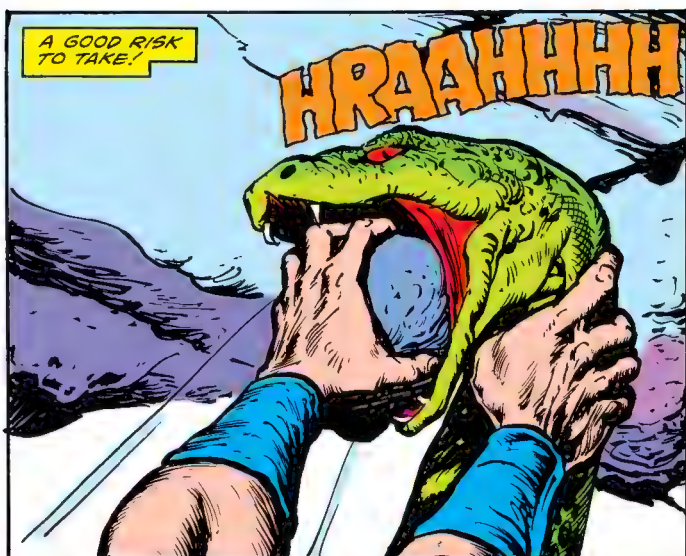
THE SNAKE WHIPS AND THRASHES WITH A
STRENGTH THRICE HIS OWN, AND HE KNOWS
THE CONTEST WILL BE A BRIEF ONE...

HE WILL LOSE TO
THE SERPENT, YES,
BUT ONLY AFTER
DEFEATING HIS
OWN FEAR...

WAIT! ONE OF THE LARGE ROCKS
ON THE GROTTO FLOOR--!

THE
YOUNG
PICT
CANNOT
MOVE--

A SMALL CHANCE
AT BEST, AND IF HE
RELEASES ONE OF
HIS ARMS-- THE
FATAL STRIKE WILL
COME ALL THE SOONER.



... AND HAS MOVED STRAIGHT TO THE SHRINE, USING CONN'S COURAGE AS A LADDER TO THE FINAL PRIZE.

CONN FORFEITS ALL, AND THE BONES BELONG TO AKEVAK... BUT THE PRIZE IS HOLLOW.

AND IT IS THE SON OF CONAN WHO SMILES WITH A SENSE OF HIS OWN, ASSURED MANHOOD. THE PICTS MAY NOT RECOGNIZE THE FACT, BUT CONN KNOWS HE HAS PROVEN IT IN THE ONLY WAY THAT MATTERS...

... TO HIS OWN INNER SATISFACTION AND PRIDE.

AND MAYHAP TO AKEVAK'S SATISFACTION AS WELL, FOR A SUBTLE CHANGE HAS WORKED INTO THE PICT'S MANNER...

PERHAPS, AQUILONIAN, WE COULD SHARE THE PRIZES...

PERHAPS WE COULD CONVINCE GORANDA ZEK THAT WE BOTH PASSED THE RITE.

PERHAPS...

BUT CONN'S ATTENTION IS ALREADY DISTRACTED BY THE BONES...

THE SHAPE IS WRONG FOR ARMS OR LEGS. COULD THEY BE... FINGER BONES? NO... FAR TOO LARGE... THEY MUST BE ARM BONES, WORN AWAY BY TIME...

IN ANY EVENT, IT'S GETTING DARK - BRING YOUR PRIZES, AKEVAK, AND WE'LL FIND A PLACE TO SPEND THE NIGHT.

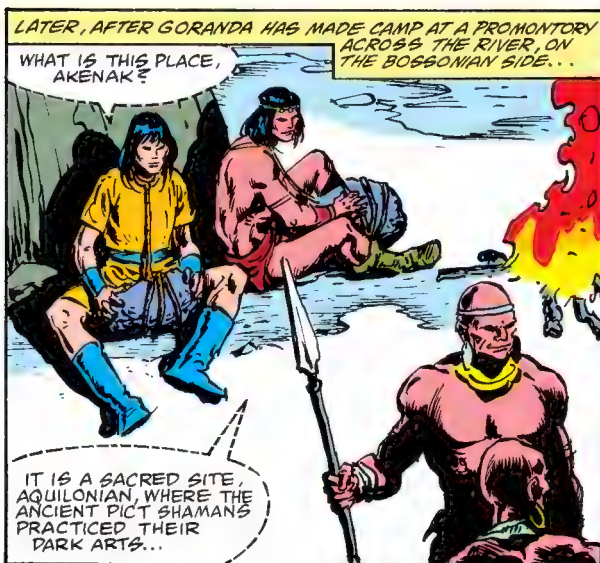
I DON'T CARE TO BE IN THIS DEVIL'S LAIR WHEN THAT THING'S MATE RETURNS FOR--

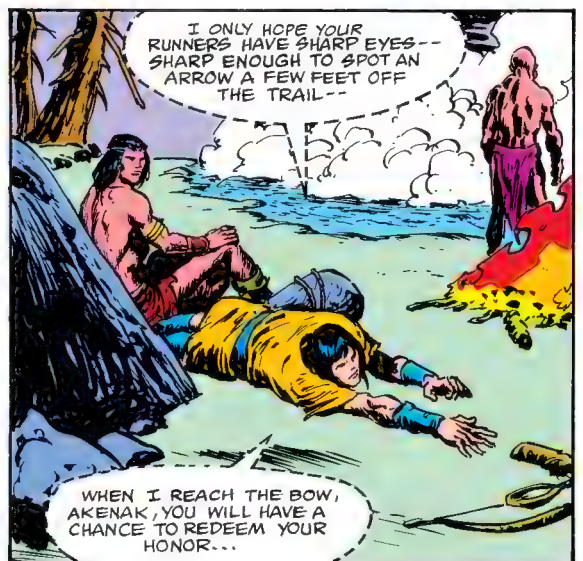
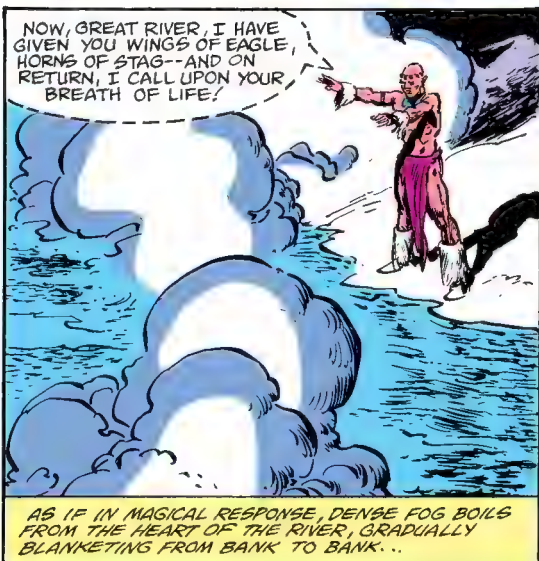
I CONGRATULATE YOU ON COMPLETING THE RITE...

NOW, IF YOU WILL SURRENDER THE PRIZES...

... YOU ARE MY PRISONERS.

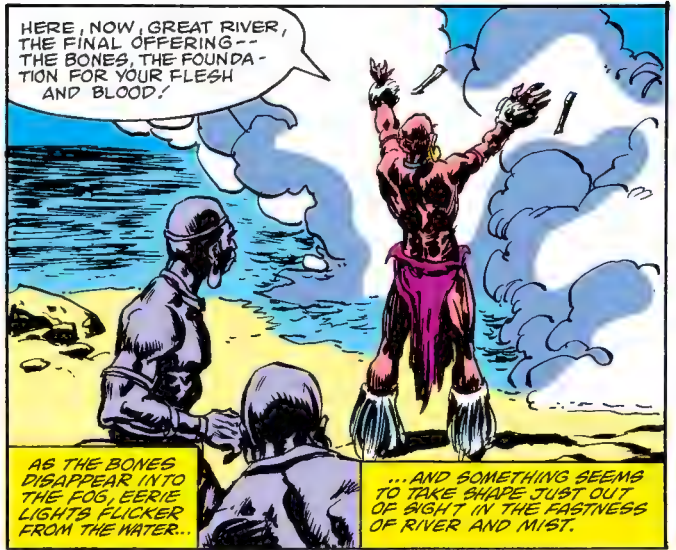
GORANDA ZEK!







NOW, AKENAK--DRAW THEIR ATTENTION AWAY FROM ME!



HERE, NOW, GREAT RIVER, THE FINAL OFFERING-- THE BONES, THE FOUNDATION FOR YOUR FLESH AND BLOOD.

AS THE BONES DISAPPEAR INTO THE FOG, EERIE LIGHTS FLICKER FROM THE WATER...

... AND SOMETHING SEEMS TO TAKE SHAPE JUST OUT OF SIGHT IN THE FASTNESS OF RIVER AND MIST.



IT IS ONLY THEN, WHEN GORANDA'S HENCHMEN TURN AWAY FROM THE CHILLING SIGHT, THAT--

UHN--!

BLOOD-AX'S SON TRYING TO ESCAPE!



STOP HIM!

AKENAK DOES WELL IN DISTRACTING THEM...

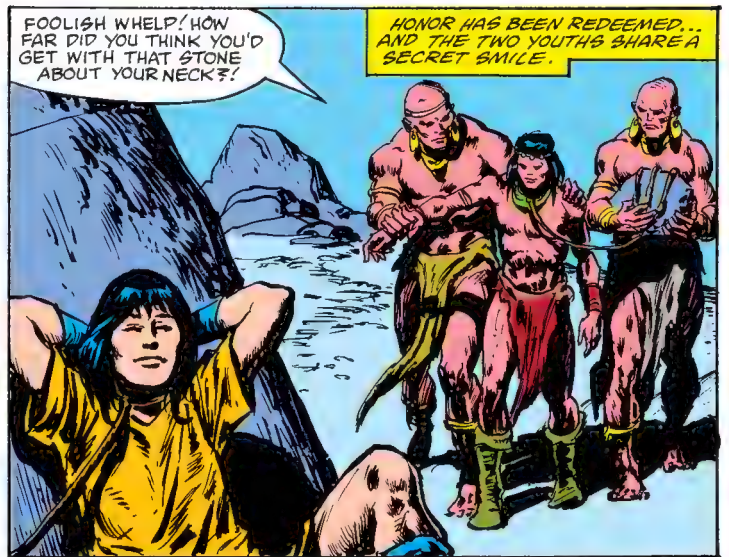
NOW I MUST DO JUST AS WELL WITH THE MESSAGE.



SLEEP ONE MORE NIGHT IN THE DEPTHS OF YOUR RIVER, BROWN MAN, FOR ON THE MORROW, I PROMISE YOU...

... YOU SHALL FEAST ON THE LIFE OF *KINGS*.

AND, LOOKING DOWN AT THE DARK MIRACLE HIS MAGICKS HAVE WROUGHT, GORANDA SEES NOTHING OVERHEAD.



FOOLISH WHELP! HOW FAR DID YOU THINK YOU'D GET WITH THAT STONE ABOUT YOUR NECK?!

HONOR HAS BEEN REDEEMED... AND THE TWO YOUTHS SHARE A SECRET SMILE.

NEXT MORNING, A PICT RUNNER BURSTS INTO THE VILLAGE....



DEKANAWATHA--! A MESSAGE... FOUND... JUST OFF... TRAIL...

IT IS IN YOUR WRITING, CONAN.



AYE-- "WE ARE PRISONERS OF GORANDA-- BEING TAKEN TO VILLAGE AT WATERFALL. BEWARE THE BROWN MAN. CONN AND AKENAK." "HMM... THE BROWN MAN... DOUBTLESS A REFERENCE TO A PICT..."



BUT STILL, WHY WOULD CONN PHRASE IT IN SUCH CODE?

NO CODE, CONAN... BUT RATHER THE NAME OF THE MOST FEARSOME DEVIL EVER TO HAUNT BLACK RIVER. IT WAS SLAIN AGES GONE, BY ONE OF MY VERY ANCESTORS...



BUT NOW, IT SEEMS, GORANDA ZEK HAS FOUND A WAY TO REVIVIFY HIM.

GORANDA'S SHAMAN'S HUT IS EMPTY--AND HIS HENCHMEN ARE GONE!



I SMELL FIERCE TREACHERY, CONAN, AND I FEAR THAT OUR SONS ARE IN MORTAL DANGER!

WE DEPART IN MOMENTS, CONAN, WITH A PARTY OF MY FIVE BEST WARRIORS.



HONE YOUR BLADE FOR WAR.

I LIKE IT NOT, CONAN, AND I AM CHILLED WITH THE SAME DREAD FELT WHEN WE CROSSED THAT HELLISH RIVER. IT COULD BE A TRAP...



AYE, TROCERO, AND I COULD BE A KING WHO FEARS TRAPS AND INTRIGUES ALL AROUND HIM, 'TIL HE IS AFRAID TO LEAVE THE FALSE SAFETY OF HIS THRONE.

BUT I AM NOT SUCH A KING. YOU WILL REMAIN BEHIND AS REGENT IN MY ABSENCE...

"BESIDES, TROCERO, WHAT HARM CAN COME TO ME? THEY ARE ONLY *SIX PICTS*."

BUT AS CONAN RIDES BESIDE DEKANAWATHA, HE KNOWS HIS PARTING COMMENT WAS MERELY BRAVADO.



THE PICTS ARE FIERCE WARRIORS, AND THEIR ULULATING CRIES OF WAR HAVE CHILLED MEN'S SOULS SINCE TIME IMMEMORIAL.

INDEED, THE PICT CHIEFTAIN ALONE WOULD BE FOE ENOUGH TO CAUSE HIM WORRY... IF NOT DEFEAT.

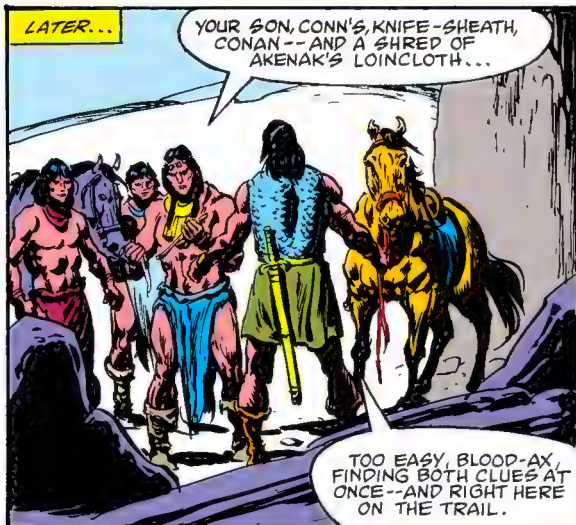
NO, NOT DEFEAT... NOT QUITE.



STILL, BETTER TO RIDE WITH DEKANAWATHA THAN AGAINST HIM.

LATER...

YOUR SON, CONN'S, KNIFE-SHEATH, CONAN-- AND A SHRED OF AKENAK'S LOINCLOTH...



TOO EASY, BLOOD-AX, FINDING BOTH CLUES AT ONCE--AND RIGHT HERE ON THE TRAIL.

YES, I SMELL THE TRAP, TOO. AND YET... DO WE WISH TO TURN BACK?

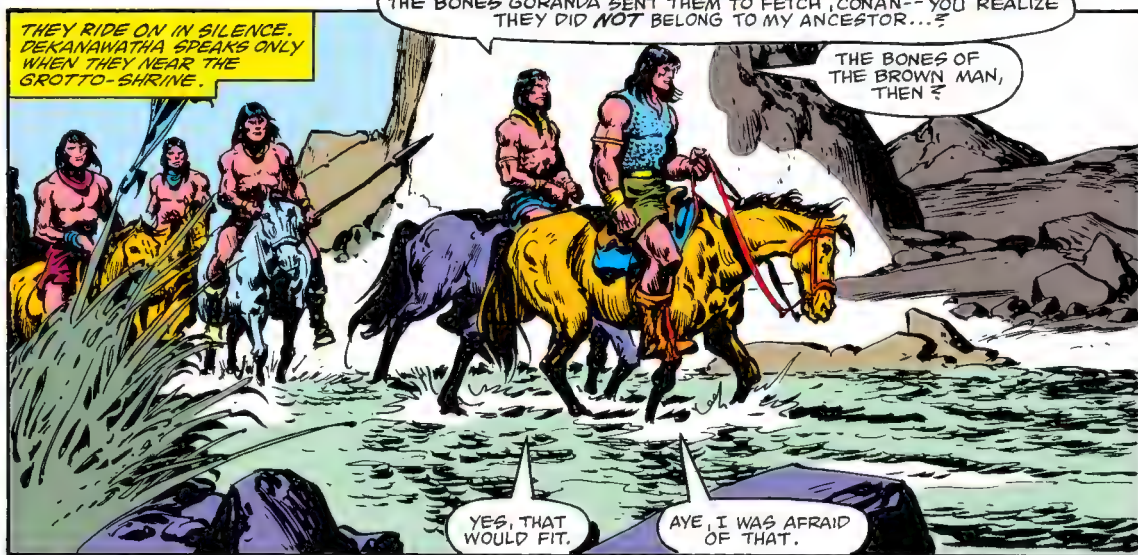
CONAN'S PIERCING BLUE EYES SMOLDER AND THE TONE OF HIS VOICE WOULD RAISE THE HACKLES OF A LESSER MAN THAN DEKANAWATHA, THOUGH HE SPEAKS BUT FOUR SIMPLE WORDS...



THEY ARE OUR SONS.

THEY RIDE ON IN SILENCE. DEKANAWATHA SPEAKS ONLY WHEN THEY NEAR THE GROTTO-SHRINE.

THE BONES GORANDA SENT THEM TO FETCH, CONAN-- YOU REALIZE THEY DID *NOT* BELONG TO MY ANCESTOR...?



THE BONES OF THE BROWN MAN, THEN?

YES, THAT WOULD FIT.

AYE, I WAS AFRAID OF THAT.



AND THIS IS THE GROTTO-SHRINE?

YES, CONAN, IT WAS PROBABLY HERE THAT GORANDA ZEK TOOK THEM CAPTIVE AND--



THEY COME FROM NOWHERE AND EVERYWHERE, SOME THIRTY OF THEM, HOWLING AND SHRIEKING AS THEY SPRING FROM ROCK AND BRUSH...

THEY ALL HAVE BEEN PROMISED MUCH BY THE SHAMAN, GORANDA ZEK.



DEATH TO DEKANAWATHA BLOOD-AX AND THE AQUILONIAN KING!



YOUR SUBJECTS, BLOOD-AX--IT SEEMS THEY ARE NOT ALL LOYAL!



THEY SOON WILL BE, CONAN--LOYAL OR DEAD!



AND THE BLACK RIVER SPLASHES RED AS CONAN AND DEKANAWATHA CARVE A PATH THROUGH THE PICT ATTACKERS, BROADSWORD AND WAR-AX HUMMING IN DREADFUL HARMONY...

NEVERTHELESS--



THERE ARE ONLY FOUR OF US LEFT! FLEE-- AND I'LL DEAL WITH THESE DOGS SOME OTHER DAY!



CROSS OVER TO THE AQUILONIAN SIDE, BLOOD-AX! WE CAN DOUBLE BACK AT THE FALLS!

NO, CONAN-- THERE MAY BE ANOTHER AMBUSH ON THE OTHER SIDE!

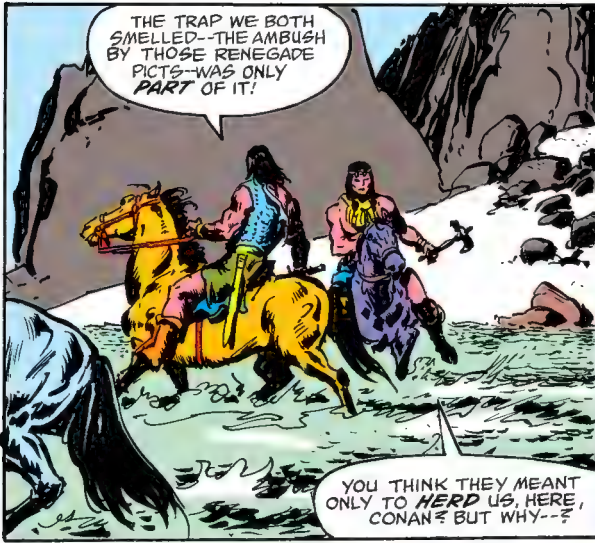
AS LONG AS THE RIVER STAYS SHALLOW, BEST TO KEEP IN THE MIDDLE!



BUT AS SOON AS THEY ROUND THE FIRST BEND...

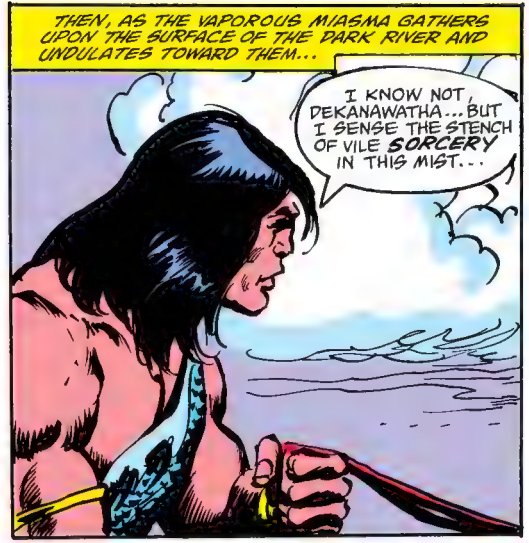
THEY'VE HALTED THEIR PURSUIT, BLOOD-AX-- HANGING BACK OUT OF SIGHT...

EH--?



THE TRAP WE BOTH
SMELLED--THE AMBUSH
BY THOSE RENEGADE
PICTS--WAS ONLY
PART OF IT!

YOU THINK THEY MEANT
ONLY TO *HERD* US, HERE,
CONAN? BUT WHY--?



THEN, AS THE VAPOROUS MIASMA GATHERS
UPON THE SURFACE OF THE DARK RIVER AND
UNDULATES TOWARD THEM...

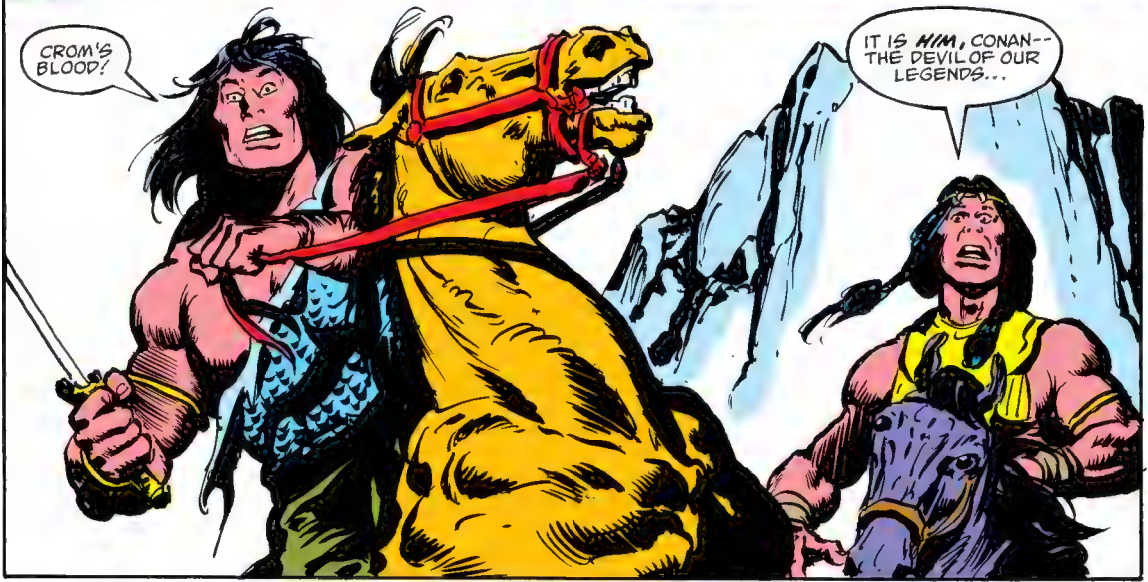
I KNOW NOT,
DEKANAWATHA... BUT
I SENSE THE STENCH
OF VILE *SORCERY*
IN THIS MIST...



... BUT BY CROM AND
MITRA I'LL STAND READY
TO FACE *ANYTHING* TO SAVE
MY SON-- EVEN IF THE
WHOLE RIVER SHOULD BE
COVERED IN THIS CURSED
MIST!



CONAN, LOOK! SOMETHING
MOVES IN IT-- SOMETHING
HUGE!



CROM'S
BLOOD!

IT IS *HIM*, CONAN--
THE DEVIL OF OUR
LEGENDS...

"...THE BROWN MAN
OF THE RIVER!"

THE THING RISES FROM DARK WATER AND
SHROUDING FOG, A GIANT FIVE TIMES CONAN'S
HEIGHT, HIS FLESH MUD-BROWN AND SLIMY,
COVERED WITH SHAGGY MOSS-LIKE HAIR...

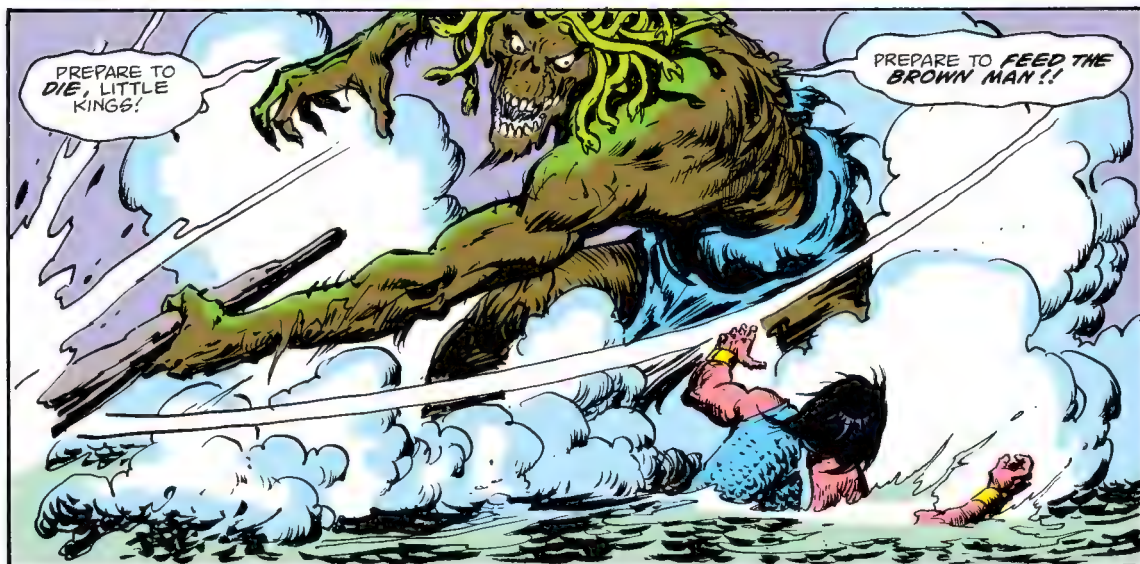
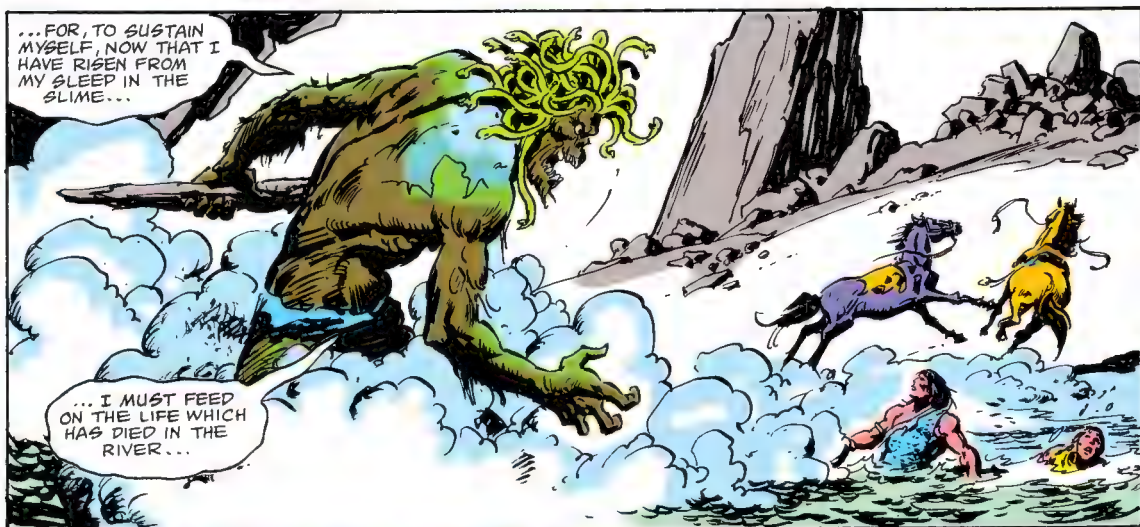
SNAKES WRITHE ATOP HIS
GROTESQUE, SKULLISH
HEAD AND A FALLEN TREE
SERVES AS A CLUB...

BUT MOST SHOCKING OF
ALL, IN A LIQUID BURBLE
OF DISTORTED SOUND, HE
SPEAKS...

AYE--I AM THE BROWN
MAN OF THE RIVER, O KINGS,
AND I HAVE BEEN RESUR-
RECTED BY THE WITCH-MAN
GORANDA ZEK...

...HE WHO HAS
APPOINTED ME TO
SLAY YOU!





TERRIFIED WHEN THEY WERE CHILDREN BY TALES OF THE BROWN MAN TOLD AROUND THE NIGHT-FIRES, THE TWO OTHER PICTS FORGET THEIR STANDING AS DEKANAWATHA'S HAND-CHOSEN ESCORT...

...AND THEY FLEE.

UNTIL--

AWAY, LITTLE MEN-- AWAY TO YOUR DEATHS! FLOAT UPON THE FARTHER WATER UNTIL I NEED A LATER FEED...

RIGHT NOW I WOULD FEAST UPON THE FLESH OF KINGS!

AND MY BLADE WOULD DRINK THE BLOOD OF A DEVIL!

BUT NO BLOOD JETS FROM THE WOUND.

INSTEAD, ONLY A BRACKISH ICHOR OF RIVER WATER GUSHES...

...AND THE BROWN MAN'S MUDLIKE FLESH QUICKLY OOZES DOWN TO SEAL THE WOUND.

THE BROWN MAN CANNOT BE INJURED BY LOSS OF THE LIFE-FLUID, LITTLE KING...

...NOT WHILE I STAND IN THE WATERS WHICH EVER REPLENISH ME!

CROM!



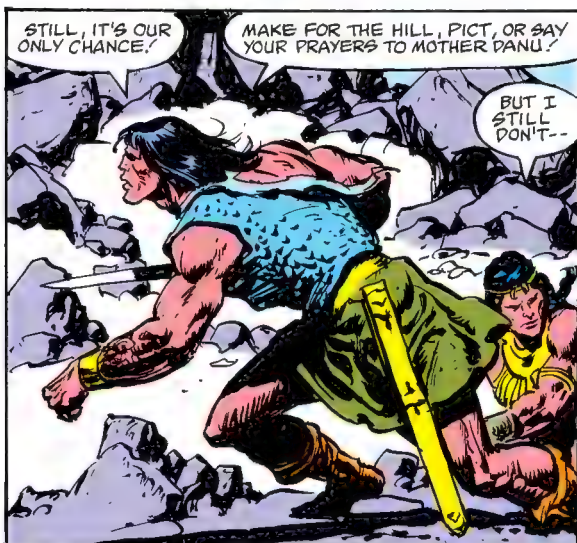
THE RENEGADES' TRICK OF
HERDING US INTO AN AMBUSH,
BLOOD-AX-- IT MAY BE *OUR*
ONLY SANE TACTIC AS WELL...

LEAD THE BROWN
MAN INTO AN AMBUSH,
CONAN--?



BUT WE HAVE NO
ALLIES TO *SPRING*
IT ON HIM?

I DIDN'T
SAY IT WOULD
BE *EASY*.



STILL, IT'S OUR
ONLY CHANCE.

MAKE FOR THE HILL, PICT, OR SAY
YOUR PRAYERS TO MOTHER DANU!

BUT I
STILL
DON'T--

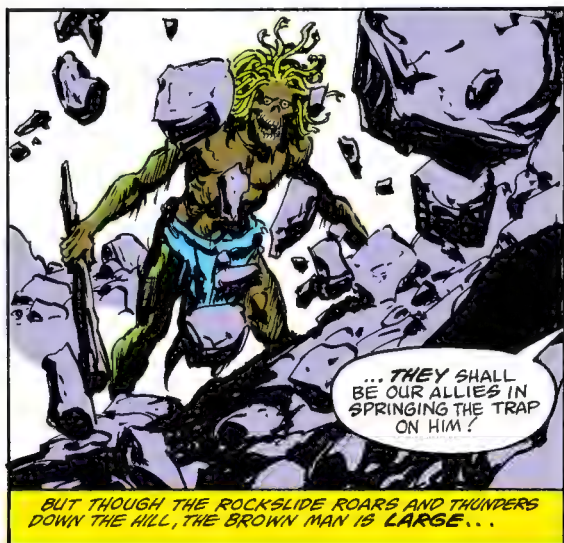


HURRY, BLOOD-AX--
HELP ME START AN
AVALANCHE!



AVALANCHE?
THEN THE ROCKS
THEMSELVES--

NGH! AYE,
BLOOD-AX...



... *THEY* SHALL
BE OUR ALLIES IN
SPRINGING THE TRAP
ON HIM?

BUT THOUGH THE ROCKSLIDE ROARS AND THUNDERS
DOWN THE HILL, THE BROWN MAN IS *LARGE*...

...AND WHEN THE DUST HAS SETTLED, HE STILL STANDS--
MERELY KNEE-DEEP IN THE RUBBLE...

WOULD THAT
I REMEMBERED
HOW TO LAUGH,
LITTLE KING?
DID YOU REALLY
THINK THESE
STONES
COULD SLAY
THE BROWN
MAN?

THEY WERE NOT
MEANT TO KILL YOU--
BUT SIMPLY TO HOLD
YOU IN PLACE...

...LONG ENOUGH FOR *THIS BOULDER* TO
KILL YOU, SHOULD I SO CHOOSE. NOW... ARE
YOU PREPARED TO LISTEN?

LISTEN--? YOU HAVE
A CHANCE TO END MY LIFE
BY ACTING--AND YOU
WOULD INSTEAD *SPEAK?*

AYE--I'VE LEARNED A LESSON
FROM MY SON. 'TIS TIME FOR
DIPLOMACY AND COMPROMISE...

WE NEED A CLEAR PATH
DOWNRIVER TO THE WATER--
FALL--OUR WAY IS BLOCKED BY
SOME THIRTY OF GORANDA
ZEK'S LOYAL PICTS.

YOU ARE ASKING ME TO *BETRAY*
GORANDA ZEK-- HE WHO GRANTED
ME NEW LIFE THROUGH HIS
CONJURATIONS.

AYE--EITHER THAT OR *LOSE*
YOUR NEW LIFE WHEN THIS
BOULDER CRUSHES YOUR SKULL.
AND REMEMBER THAT YOU NO
LONGER STAND IN THE RIVER--
THERE IS NO WAY TO "REPLENISH
YOUR LIFE-FLUIDS."

VERY WELL, PALE
LITTLE KING--YOU
LEAVE ME NO
CHOICE.

YOU NEED LIFE TO SUSTAIN
YOURSELF. CLEAR THE WAY FOR US
THROUGH THE PICTS AND YOU MAY
DO WITH THEM WHAT YOU WILL.

THEN, AS THE BROWN MAN EXTRICATES HIMSELF FROM THE RUBBLE OF THE ROCKSLIDE...

CAN HE BE TRUSTED, CONAN?

HE'S YOUR LEGEND--YOU TELL ME.

ONLY ONE THING IS CERTAIN, BLOOD-AX... WE CAN'T CUT OUR WAY THROUGH ALL THIRTY OF THOSE RENEGADE PICTS, AND--

--AND THEY HAVE OUR SONS.

YES, CONAN, I KNOW.

SOMEWWHAT TO THEIR SURPRISE, THE BROWN MAN KEEPS HIS WORD, LEADING THE WAY DOWNRIVER...

THE PICTS LURK AROUND THE NEXT BEND, BROWN MAN...

THEN WAIT HERE, LITTLE KINGS, UNTIL YOU HEAR THE SOUND OF THE BROWN MAN'S FURY...

THE BROWN MAN--? BUT WHAT ARE YOU DOING *HERE*?

ARE DEKANAWATHA AND CONAN *DEAD* AS OUR MASTER WISHES--?

NO, LITTLE ONES...



...BUT YOU ARE DEAD--
AS THE BROWN MAN
WISHES!

THE SLAUGHTER IS A SAVAGE SPECTACLE OF
CHAOS, SWIRLING IN SWIFT CIRCLES OF CRIMSON
VIOLENCE...



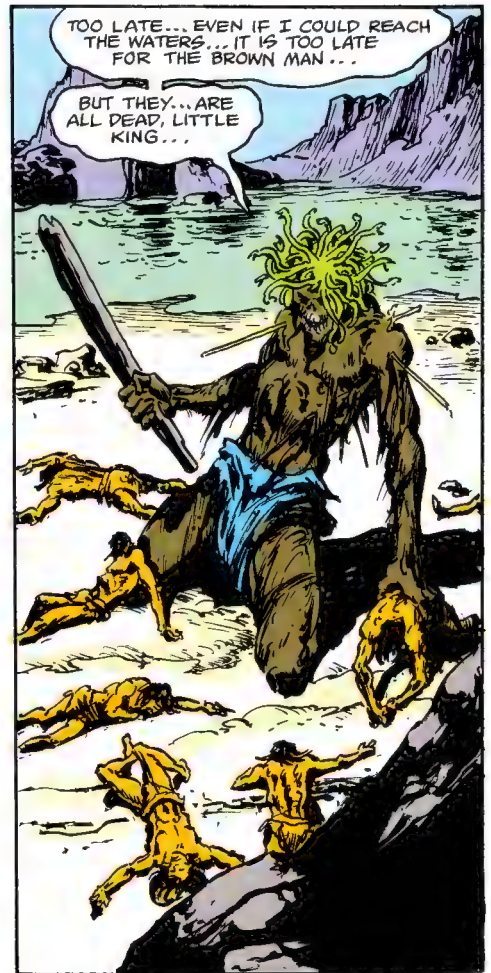
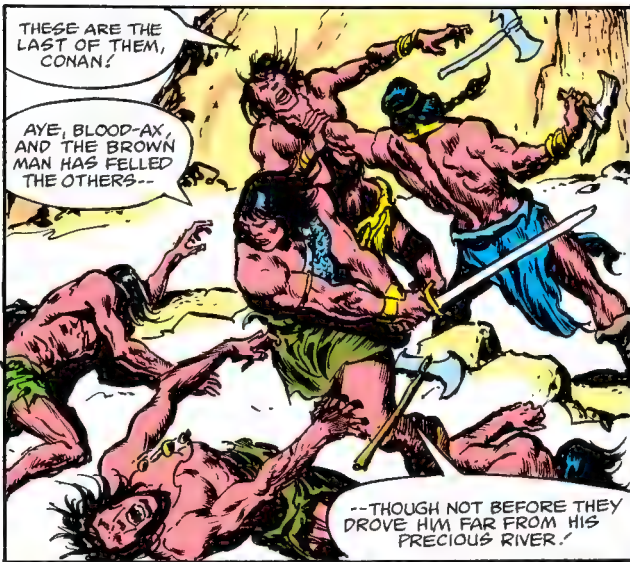
NOW, DEKANAWATHA! MOST
OF THE PICTS ATTACK THE BROWN
MAN--LEAVING BUT A FEW FOR
OUR BLADES!

YET, EVEN THOUGH THE SMALL PICTS ARE CRUSHED
AND SLAMMED, ONE AFTER THE OTHER, BY GNARLED
CLUB AND JAGGED ROCK, IT IS CLEAR THAT GORANDA
ZER'S HEYCHIMAN WAS WRONG TO CALL THEM
COWARDLY...



THEIR OPPOSITION
IS BOTH VALIANT
AND FRENZIED--
AND THEY SUCCEED
IN DEALING A
DOZEN GRIEVOUS
WOUNDS TO THEIR
MAMMOTH
ATTACKER...

SOON IT WILL ALL END... AND ONLY TWO WILL
STAND IN WITNESS TO THE RED HAVOC.



... BUT AS THE TWO MEN HEAD DOWNRIVER IN QUEST OF THEIR SONS, CONAN CANNOT HELP FEELING A CERTAIN MEASURE OF SYMPATHY FOR THE FALLEN GIANT.

YOU **BROOD**, KING CONAN, BUT KNOW THIS...

DIPLOMACY IS ONE THING--DEALING WITH THE DEVIL IS QUITE ANOTHER.

AYE, DEKANAWATHA, I SUPPOSE.

FINALLY, BY NIGHTFALL...

THE VILLAGE!

PAINTED SILVER BY THE MOON, THE RIVER RUSHES FOR THE FALLS.

QUIETLY CONAN, LET US SEARCH THE HUTS.

HERE.

WE SHALL WAIT HERE BY THE WATER-FALL.

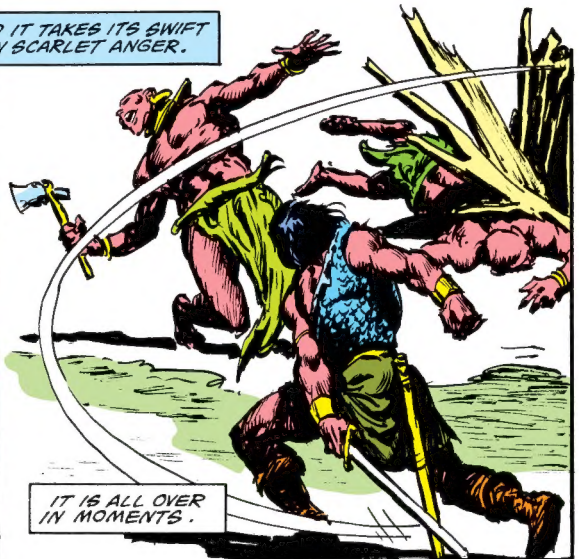
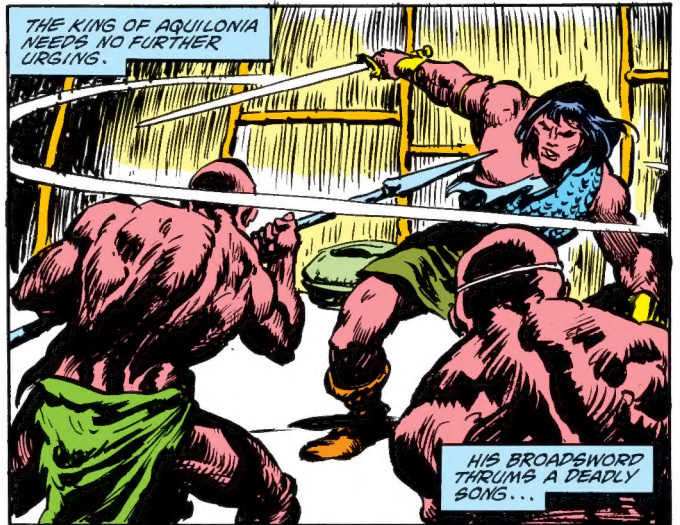
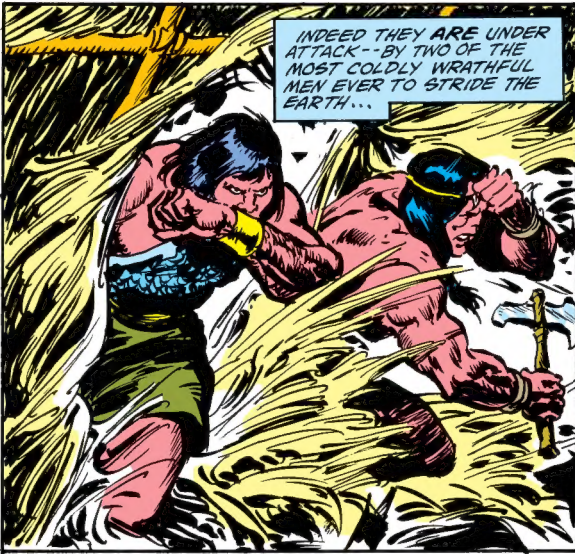
-- UNTIL THE AMBUSH PARTY RETURNS WITH WORD OF DEKANAWATHA'S AND CONAN'S DEATHS, WHEREUPON EVERY LOYAL PICT SHALL RALLY TO OUR CAUSE.

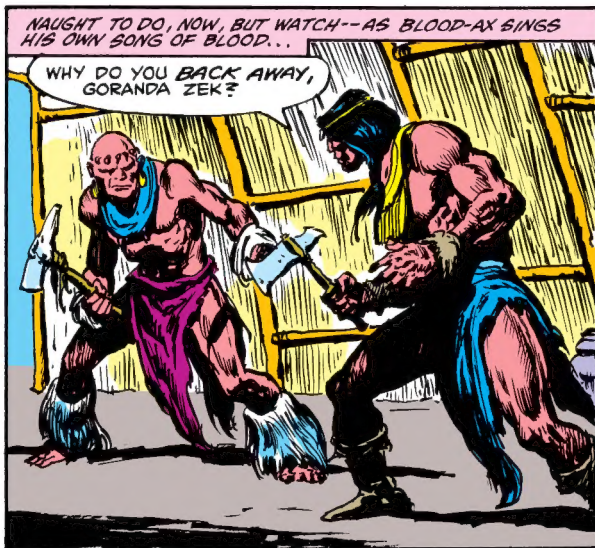
YES, GORANDA, AND I HOPE THE AMBUSH PARTY BRINGS THE KINGS' HEADS...

I'D LIKE TO HANG THE SKULL OF THAT CIMMERIAN BARBARIAN FROM MY--

--URK-K!

BY THE BLOOD OF MOTHER DANI! WE ARE UNDER ATTACK!





NAUGHT TO DO, NOW, BUT WATCH-- AS BLOOD-AX SINGS HIS OWN SONG OF BLOOD...

WHY DO YOU BACK AWAY, GORANDA ZEK?



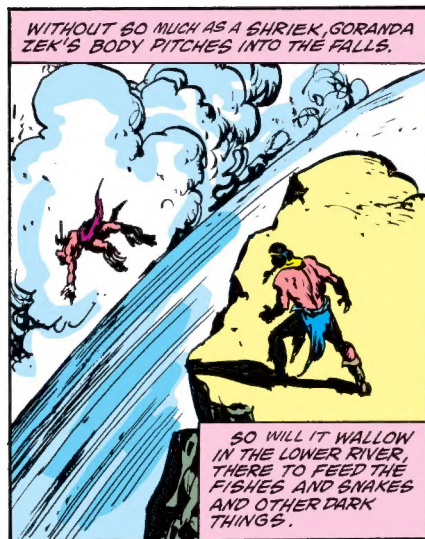
YOU WANTED TO USURP MY CHIEFTAINSHIP--

STAND AND TAKE IT NOW-- MAN TO MAN!



OR DO YOU WANT THE CHIEFTAINSHIP BROUGHT TO YOU--

--LIKE THIS!



WITHOUT SO MUCH AS A SHRIEK, GORANDA ZEK'S BODY PITCHES INTO THE FALLS.

SO WILL IT WALLOW IN THE LOWER RIVER, THERE TO FEED THE FISHES AND SNAKES AND OTHER DARK THINGS.



LATER...

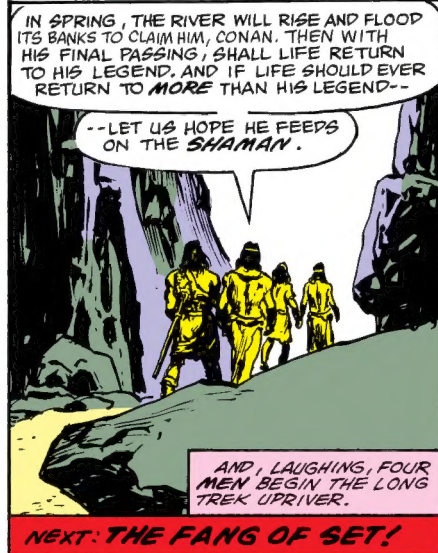
OUT OF CURIOSITY, LADS... WHO COMPLETED THE RITES SUCCESSFULLY?

HE DID!



IT SEEMS, CONAN, THAT OUR SONS HAVE GROWN UP.

AYE, DEKANAWATHA BLOOD-AX, THAT THEY HAVE. BUT WHAT, NOW, OF THE BROWN MAN?



IN SPRING, THE RIVER WILL RISE AND FLOOD ITS BANKS TO CLAIM HIM, CONAN. THEN WITH HIS FINAL PASSING, SHALL LIFE RETURN TO HIS LEGEND, AND IF LIFE SHOULD EVER RETURN TO MORE THAN HIS LEGEND--

--LET US HOPE HE FEEDS ON THE SHAMAN.

AND, LAUGHING, FOUR MEN BEGIN THE LONG TREK UPRIVER.

NEXT: THE FANG OF SET!

KING CONAN

c/o MARVEL COMICS GROUP
575 Madison Avenue
New York, New York 10022

LOUISE JONES
EDITOR
DANNY FINGEROTH
ASSISTANT EDITOR

Dear Marvel,

DeCamp and Carter's *Conan The Avenger* possesses its own exciting energy, and makes subtle, inventive use of the Robert E. Howard-established Hyborian mythos. This was especially evident in the adapted segment featured in KING CONAN #7. Like so many other faithful followers, I've waited almost a decade for your visual version of Conan and Yezdigard's conclusive clash. It was definitely worth the wait, as was seeing our grim hero reunited with the Red Brotherhood and the beautiful Yasmina.

Kevin C. McConnell
118 Main Ave.
Warren, PA 16365

Dear Louise, etc.,

KING CONAN #7 was definitely to my tastes. It's amazing how fluidly your scripts recapture the flavor of the original novel. And I could go on forever, praising John Buscema and Ernie Chan's contributions to the visual medium, but somehow that's not enough. Conan's imprisonment and sudden breakout in the first few pages were illustrated in the remarkable manner that only that team can manage. By the time Conan jumped out of the tower and into the sea, I had completely forgotten that this was Count Trocero's interpretation of the story, as told to Prince Conn. In any case, you can see how engrossed I quickly became with the storyline. After Rolf disappeared, it became harder to follow, though, having a totally different theme than earlier in the story. But maybe this meshing was why I'm so looking forward to the conclusion.

I've read most of the Conan novels, even the latest, *Conan The Mercenary*, but I missed *Conan The Avenger* and *Conan The Usurper*. Perhaps you could adapt the second one?

Napoleon Zivkovic
224 E. 26th St.
Paterson, NJ 07514

In a way we already have, Napoleon — for **KING CONAN THE USURPER** wasn't a novel but a collection of short stories, most (if not all) of which have been adapted over the years in our brother mag, **SAVAGE SWORD OF CONAN**.

By the way, if you're interested in Big John Buscema's work, keep your eyes open for a forthcoming issue of **EPIC**, which will feature a **WEIRDWORLD** story meticulously illustrated by John and written by the strip's creator, Doug Moench (who, as you may have noticed, has taken over the scripting reins on KING CONAN as well). We guarantee you: it'll be a treat.

Dear Louise,

"A Clash Of Kings" was great, as was John Buscema's work. (Is there any chance he'll ever ink his own pencils again?) He and Ernie work well together, visually capturing the strength of Robert E. Howard's most popular hero. Also, the villainess, Thanara, is one of the few females in this book who is a power in her own right. I hope she'll play a greater role in the conclusion of *Conan The Avenger*. The return of Rolf of Aesgaard showed a nice flair for continuity in the



series, and it's good to see Yasmina back, since she too can hold her own with Conan around.

Suggestions for future KING CONAN stories (you have so many areas to cover): Conan's son, Prince Conn, is one of the rare sons of a hero who isn't crazy or being kidnapped all the time, so do something more with him. And how about showing the fates of some of Conan's friends and allies over the years?

Charles David Haskell
15 W. 139th St.
New York, NY 10037

Doug's got some jaw-dropping surprises in store for Conan's chums, Charles — just wait and see! As for Big John inking himself, check out **SAVAGE SWORD OF CONAN #73**, where you'll get your wish — in spades!

Dear Marvel,

KING CONAN #7 was great. If every comic was as good as this one, you'd be sold out every week. Conan is the strongest, gutsiest hero around, using brains and brawn to stop his opponents. If you keep writing great comics like this one, I'll buy it every week. 'Nuff said.

Beau Beaujon
1270 Franklin St.
Johnstown, PA

'Nuff said, for you maybe, Beau. But Doug, John, and Danny almost went out and bought a one-way ticket for the hills. Y'see, they all thought you knew something they didn't when you referred to KING CONAN coming out every week, and our already overworked creative team just sort of freaked out. You gotta watch it when you're talking to these high-strung creative types. (Seriously, thanks for the kind words, and we really wish it were possible to put out KING CONAN on a weekly basis. Keep reading, Beau. Your support means everything in the world to us.)

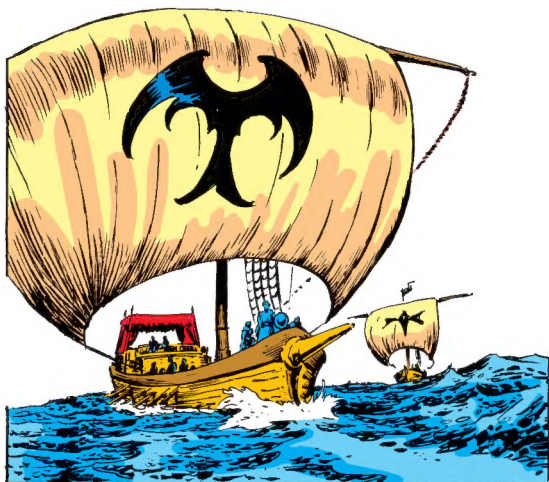
Dear Marvel,

KING CONAN #7 was out of sight. I love seeing the older Conan meet up with long-lost friends. Have Tara and Yusef reappear soon and have them both be very warlike. And I do wish you'd have Conan meet a few Marvel super-characters that would fit in perfectly with a few of his stories, like Venus, Thor, The Black Knight, Valkyrie or Hercules.

Wilson Rivera
805 Grand St.
Brooklyn, NY 11211

We don't think Conan will ever be meeting other Marvel characters, Wilson — but ya never know! Thor fans can find their hero in his own monthly book, as well as in THE AVENGERS, and Black Knight fans can look for that hero to reappear in the future in Marvel's forthcoming MARVEL FAN-FARE. What's that? It's editor Al Milgrom's new project, a 32 page slick paper, no-ad comic with deluxe color, soon to be released to comics shops, and featuring brand new stories of Marvel characters as done by Marvel's top creative talents. Watch for it.

(LETTERS CONTINUE ON NEXT PAGE...)



Dear Louise and Co.,

I've been buying CONAN and KING CONAN for two years now, and for some reason, I thought I didn't like them. Lately though, it has dawned on me that these are two of my *favorite* titles. I realized this after reading KING CONAN #7. The writing, penciling, inking, coloring and lettering all added up to a tremendous experience. (This is the first time I've noticed the lettering on *any* comic.) The story flowed nicely, yet moved quickly. I liked seeing the pirates and learning that the legend of Conan still lives among them. How about bringing them back in future issues? Keep up the good work (and the pin-ups.)

Alex Kasman
73-47 189th St.
Flushing, NY 11366

We know you like the titles, Alex. Now tell us what you think of the books! (Just kidding.) And we'll see what we can do about bringing back your piratical penpals.

Dear Louise,

First, I'd like to compliment you and your staff on your excellent publication. Each issue has been faithfully and skillfully adapted from the Conan novels. Recently, however, it did come to my attention that there is a mistake in KING CONAN #7. To wit: the Vilayet Sea is an inland body of water without any outlets to the ocean. It is therefore erroneous to have Conan refer to his men as Barachans, the Barachan Isles being located in the Western Ocean, about a thousand miles from the Vilayet Sea. At the end of the page on which Thanara is carried off, Conan gives an order to his men to sail the ship back to the Barachan Isles. This is an obvious error, because they would have to *sail* over mountains and deserts to reach the ocean, an impossibility even for Conan!

Tim Fraley
1731 SE 9th St.
Ft. Lauderdale, FL 33316

What?! Mistake? Us?!

When Conan refers to his men as Barachans, he's just confusing them in the heat of battle with Barachans, whom he also ran with in younger days and still holds fond thoughts of. Or he meant the term as a compliment. As far as mountains and desserts and sailing, haven't you ever heard of "ships of the dessert"? No? How about the Stygian Canal? No? (Okay, Tim, you caught us. And a certified gold-plated *No Prize* to any Howardite who can get us out of this mess!)

Dear Louise,

The latest issue of KING CONAN, number 7, was possibly the best issue so far, with exciting cover, terrific story, gorgeous art—and I loved your "Hyborian Pin-Up Gallery." Absolutely fantastic.

But...wait...what is this I see on one of the pin-up pages? Could it be...no...maybe...it *is*! There's the name Smith penned right there on one of the pages. Could it be that Barry Smith is back? No, it doesn't say Barry...it says Paul. Paul Smith. I don't believe my eyes—*another* Smith. Crom and Mitra, this man is superb. His art is utterly fantastic. I hope and pray you give this man a chance to draw a Conan story. He's a natural.

Scott Mitchell
Rt. 1, Box 230
Fortville, IN 46040

We think Paul is something special, too, Scott. And while we're not sure at the moment if he's going to do a Conan story



or not, but we'll pass your encouragement on to him — and thanks.

Dear Conan Staff,

Thanks for your CONAN comics. The art is always terrific, the stories fantastic, except that you really should try to stay away from adaptations. KING CONAN #7, "A Clash Of Kings!", was superb, as usual. I'm glad King Yezdigerd finally got his just desserts. There is just one thing that bothers me: R.E. Howard always described Conan as a giant, towering a head over all other men, yet you continue to draw him the common height. I know it's too late to change it now, but I just wanted to get it off my chest.

David Grilla
35 Tampa St.
Worcester, MA 01604

Consider it off, David, and breathe a sigh of relief. But if it's non-adapted KING CONAN adventure you want, then stick around. 'Cause beginning this issue, our now *bi-monthly* mag will be featuring all-original storylines from Doug's fertile imagination. (Which is not to say adaptations are out for good. Lots of folks like them, too.)